SŪRAH 45

Al-Jāthiyah

(Kneeling Down)

Prologue

This *sūrah*, revealed in Makkah, describes some aspects of the reception Islam received from the idolaters. It reports their facile answers to its arguments and signs, states their stubborn rejection of the truth and shows how they unashamedly pursued desire. The Qur'ān also portrays their minds as sealed to Divine guidance, straying in whatever direction their fancies led them. Yet the Qur'ān continued to confront them with God's signs, reminded them of God's punishment and described His reward and His laws that operate in the universe.

As the *sūrah* describes those who opposed the message in Makkah, we see a group of people who insisted on going astray, who stubbornly rejected the truth and who were rude in their description of God and His revelations. Such people are described in the *sūrah* in the terms they deserve. They are also warned against God's grievous and humiliating punishment: "*Woe betide every lying, sinful person who hears God's revelations being recited to him, and yet persists in his haughty disdain, as though he had not heard them. So, give him the news of painful suffering. When he learns something of Our revelations, he ridicules it. For such people there is humiliating suffering in store. Hell lurks behind them; and all that they may have gained shall be of no avail whatsoever*

to them, nor shall any of those which they took for their protectors beside God. Grievous suffering awaits them." (Verses 7–10)

We also see a group of people, perhaps belonging to those who received earlier revelations but who were given to ill thoughts and misjudgement. They paid little attention to the truth of faith and saw little difference between those who did evil and those who did good works. The *sūrah* makes it abundantly clear to them that there is a huge difference between these two types on God's scales. It describes them as ill-judging and makes it clear that God judges all on the basis of absolute justice, which has been ingrained within the core of the universe since the beginning of creation: "*Do those who indulge in sinful deeds think that We shall place them, both in their life and their death, on an equal footing with those who believe and do righteous deeds? Flawed is their judgement. God has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth, so that every soul shall be recompensed according to its deeds. None shall be wronged.*" (Verses 21–22)

We also see the person who has no criterion other than his own desire for judging anything. For this type, desire is the deity he worships and obeys. The *sūrah* wonders at such people and publicizes the fact that they are blind to the truth: "*Consider the one who takes his own desires as his deity, and whom God has [therefore] let go astray despite his knowledge [of the truth], sealing his ears and heart and placing a cover on his eyes: who can guide such a person after God [has abandoned him]? Will you not, then, take heed?*" (Verse 23) Such people deny the life to come altogether, express grave doubts about the issue of resurrection and accountability and they stubbornly reject the truth asking for proofs that cannot be given in this life. The Qur'ān directs such people to consider the signs and proofs already in place. They, however, remain oblivious to these: "*They say: 'There is nothing beyond our life in this world. We die, we live, nothing but time destroys us.' Of this they have no knowledge whatsoever. They merely guess. Whenever Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, their only argument is to say: 'Bring back our forefathers, if what you claim be true.' Say: 'It is God who gives you life, then causes you to die; and then He will gather you all on Resurrection Day of which there is no doubt, though most people do not understand.'*" (Verses 24–26)

It is possible to read all these descriptions as pointing to a single type of people. It is equally possible that they are different groups, all of which were opposed to the Islamic message during its period in Makkah. They would, thus, include some people to whom revelations were given in former times, but these would have been very small in number in Makkah at that time. Yet this reference to people of earlier revelations need not point to a particular group in Makkah; it may just be a pointer to a type of people that others should be made aware of.

Be that as it may, the Qur'ān confronts these people, highlighting as it does their qualities and behavioural patterns. It describes for them God's signs all over the universe and within themselves, warning them that they will have to face the reckoning on the Day of Judgement. It also cites what happened to communities before them when they abandoned Divine faith.

In the first instance, God's signs are put before them in a profound, effective and simple way: "*Surely, in the heavens and the earth there are signs for those who believe. And in your own creation, and in the animals God scatters on earth there are signs for people of sure faith. And in the alternation of night and day, and in the means of subsistence God sends down from the skies, reviving with it the earth after it had been lifeless, and in the shifting of the winds there are signs for those who use their reason. Such are God's signs that We recount to you, setting forth the truth. In what discourse will they then believe, if they deny God and His revelations?*" (Verses 3–6)

The *sūrah* then refers to other signs, showing them as blessings and favours granted by God, but the rejecters are oblivious to the message these impart: "*It is God who has subjected the sea for you, so that ships sail through it by His command, and that you may seek of His bounty, and that you give thanks. And He has subjected to you, as a gift from Himself, all that is in the heavens and on earth. In this there are signs for people who think.*" (Verses 12–13)

The *sūrah* also shows the unbelievers what they will be like on the Day of Resurrection, which is something they deny altogether: "*When the Last Hour strikes, those who follow falsehood will on that Day lose all. You will see every community on its knees. Every community will be*

summoned to its record: 'Today you shall be requited for all that you did. This Our record speaks of you in all truth; for We have been recording everything you do.' Those who believed and did righteous deeds will be admitted by their Lord into His grace. That will be the manifest triumph. And as for the unbelievers, [they will be asked]: 'When My revelations were recited to you, did you not glory in your arrogance and persist in your wicked ways? For when it was said, "God's promise will certainly come true, and there can be no doubt about the Last Hour," you would answer, "We know nothing of the Last Hour. We think it is all conjecture, and we are by no means convinced."' The evil of their deeds will become clear to them, and they will be overwhelmed by the very thing they used to deride. It will be said to them: 'Today We shall be oblivious of you as you were oblivious of the coming of this your Day! The fire will be your abode, and you will have no one to help you. Thus it is, because you received God's revelations with ridicule and allowed the life of this world to beguile you.' Therefore, they will not be brought out of the Fire on that Day, nor will they be given a chance to make amends." (Verses 27–35)

The *sūrah* leaves absolutely no doubt about the fairness of the requital or each person's individual responsibility. This fundamental principle is shown to be central in the way the universe came into existence and in the way it is maintained: "*Whoever does what is right benefits himself; and whoever does evil causes himself harm. In the end to your Lord you will all return.*" (Verse 15) This is further clarified as the *sūrah* responds to those who do evil yet consider that they will be on an equal footing with those who believe in God and do good deeds: "*God has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth, so that every soul shall be recompensed according to its deeds. None shall be wronged.*" (Verse 22)

In the way it addresses its subject matter, the *sūrah* is one single whole, but we have divided it into two parts for easier study. It begins with the two separate letters, *Ḥā, Mīm*, adding a reference to the Qur'ān: "*This Book is bestowed from on high by God, the Almighty, the Wise.*" (Verse 2) It concludes by addressing all praise to God, the absolute Lord of all the universe. This glorification of Him contrasts with the attitude of those who remain oblivious to His signs and

who ridicule His revelations: "*All praise is due to God, the Lord of the heavens, the Lord of the earth and the Lord of all the worlds. His alone is all supremacy in the heavens and the earth. He alone is the Almighty, the Wise.*" (Verses 36–37)

The *sūrah* is characterized by its easy flow and a soft beat that contrasts with the strong rhythm of the preceding *sūrah*, Smoke. God, the Creator of people's hearts and the One who has bestowed this Qur'ān from on high, sometimes addresses people in a strong and hard way, at other times with gentle touches, and then again sometimes with a soft and quiet beat. He takes into account their different conditions, circumstances, attitudes and responses. His knowledge is absolute and His wisdom infinite.

I

A Clear Way of Religion

Al-Jāthiyah (Kneeling Down)

سورة الجاثية

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Ḥā. Mīm. (1)

حٰمٓ ﴿١﴾

This Book is bestowed from on high by God, the Almighty, the Wise. (2)

تَنزِيلُ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ ٱلْعَزِيزِ ٱلْحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

Surely, in the heavens and the earth there are signs for those who believe. (3)

إِنَّ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣﴾

And in your own creation, and in the animals God scatters on earth there are signs for people of sure faith. (4)

وَفِى خَلْقِكُمْ وَمَا يَبُثُّ مِن دَآبَّةٍ ءَايَٰتٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٤﴾

وَٱخۡتِلَٰفِ ٱلَّيۡلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ وَمَآ أَنزَلَ ٱللَّهُ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مِن رِّزۡقٖ فَأَحۡيَا بِهِ ٱلۡأَرۡضَ بَعۡدَ مَوۡتِهَا وَتَصۡرِيفِ ٱلرِّيَٰحِ ءَايَٰتٞ لِّقَوۡمٖ يَعۡقِلُونَ ٥

And in the alternation of night and day, and in the means of subsistence God sends down from the skies, reviving with it the earth after it had been lifeless, and in the shifting of the winds there are signs for those who use their reason. (5)

تِلۡكَ ءَايَٰتُ ٱللَّهِ نَتۡلُوهَا عَلَيۡكَ بِٱلۡحَقِّۖ فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثِۭ بَعۡدَ ٱللَّهِ وَءَايَٰتِهِۦ يُؤۡمِنُونَ ٦

Such are God's signs that We recount to you, setting forth the truth. In what discourse will they then believe, if they deny God and His revelations? (6)

وَيۡلٞ لِّكُلِّ أَفَّاكٍ أَثِيمٖ ٧

Woe betide every lying, sinful person (7)

يَسۡمَعُ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ تُتۡلَىٰ عَلَيۡهِ ثُمَّ يُصِرُّ مُسۡتَكۡبِرٗا كَأَن لَّمۡ يَسۡمَعۡهَاۖ فَبَشِّرۡهُ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٖ ٨

who hears God's revelations being recited to him, and yet persists in his haughty disdain, as though he had not heard them. So, give him the news of painful suffering. (8)

وَإِذَا عَلِمَ مِنۡ ءَايَٰتِنَا شَيۡـٔا ٱتَّخَذَهَا هُزُوًاۚ أُوْلَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمۡ عَذَابٞ مُّهِينٞ ٩

When he learns something of Our revelations, he ridicules it. For such people there is humiliating suffering in store. (9)

مِّن وَرَآئِهِمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَلَا يُغْنِى عَنْهُم
مَّا كَسَبُوا۟ شَيْـًٔا وَلَا مَا ٱتَّخَذُوا۟ مِن
دُونِ ٱللَّهِ أَوْلِيَآءَ ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ
عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

Hell lurks behind them; and all that they may have gained shall be of no avail whatsoever to them, nor shall any of those which they took for their protectors beside God. Grievous suffering awaits them. (10)

هَٰذَا هُدًى ۖ وَٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ بِـَٔايَٰتِ رَبِّهِمْ
لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّن رِّجْزٍ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

This is true guidance; those who reject their Lord's revelations shall suffer abominable punishment. (11)

ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِى سَخَّرَ لَكُمُ ٱلْبَحْرَ لِتَجْرِىَ ٱلْفُلْكُ
فِيهِ بِأَمْرِهِۦ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا۟ مِن فَضْلِهِۦ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ
تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

It is God who has subjected the sea for you, so that ships sail through it by His command, and that you may seek of His bounty, and that you give thanks. (12)

وَسَخَّرَ لَكُم مَّا فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَمَا فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ
جَمِيعًا مِّنْهُ ۚ إِنَّ فِى ذَٰلِكَ لَـَٔايَٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ
يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

And He has subjected to you, as a gift from Himself, all that is in the heavens and on earth. In this there are signs for people who think. (13)

قُل لِّلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ يَغْفِرُوا۟ لِلَّذِينَ
لَا يَرْجُونَ أَيَّامَ ٱللَّهِ لِيَجْزِىَ قَوْمًۢا
بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

Tell the believers that they should forgive those who do not look forward to the Days of God. It is for Him alone to requite people for whatever they may have earned. (14)

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَلِنَفْسِهِۦ ۖ وَمَنْ
أَسَآءَ فَعَلَيْهَا ۖ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

Whoever does what is right benefits himself; and whoever does evil causes himself harm. In the end to your Lord you will all return. (15)

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ
وَٱلْحُكْمَ وَٱلنُّبُوَّةَ وَرَزَقْنَٰهُم مِّنَ ٱلطَّيِّبَٰتِ
وَفَضَّلْنَٰهُمْ عَلَى ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

To the Children of Israel We gave revelations, wisdom and prophethood; and We provided them with wholesome things and favoured them above all other nations. (16)

وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُم بَيِّنَٰتٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْرِ ۖ فَمَا
ٱخْتَلَفُوٓا۟ إِلَّا مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا جَآءَهُمُ
ٱلْعِلْمُ بَغْيًۢا بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ
يَقْضِى بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ فِيمَا
كَانُوا۟ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

We granted them clear indications in matters of faith. It was only after knowledge had been granted them that they began to differ maliciously among themselves. Your Lord will certainly judge between them on Resurrection Day regarding all that on which they differed. (17)

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَٰكَ عَلَىٰ شَرِيعَةٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْرِ
فَٱتَّبِعْهَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَآءَ ٱلَّذِينَ
لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

And now We have set you on a clear way of religion; so follow it, and do not follow the desires of those who do not know [the truth]. (18)

إِنَّهُمْ لَن يُغْنُوا۟ عَنكَ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ شَيْـًٔا ۚ
وَإِنَّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَآءُ بَعْضٍ ۖ
وَٱللَّهُ وَلِىُّ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

They will be of no help to you against God. The wrongdoers have only one another to protect them, whereas God is the Protector of all who are God-fearing. (19)

هَٰذَا بَصَٰٓئِرُ لِلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

This [revelation] is a means of insight for mankind, and a source of guidance and grace for people of sure faith. (20)

أَمْ حَسِبَ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱجْتَرَحُوا۟ ٱلسَّيِّـَٔاتِ أَن نَّجْعَلَهُمْ كَٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ سَوَآءً مَّحْيَاهُمْ وَمَمَاتُهُمْ ۚ سَآءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Do those who indulge in sinful deeds think that We shall place them, both in their life and their death, on an equal footing with those who believe and do righteous deeds? Flawed is their judgement. (21)

وَخَلَقَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ بِٱلْحَقِّ وَلِتُجْزَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍۭ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

God has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth, so that every soul shall be recompensed according to its deeds. None shall be wronged. (22)

أَفَرَءَيْتَ مَنِ ٱتَّخَذَ إِلَٰهَهُۥ هَوَىٰهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ ٱللَّهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِۦ وَقَلْبِهِۦ وَجَعَلَ عَلَىٰ بَصَرِهِۦ غِشَٰوَةً فَمَن يَهْدِيهِ مِنۢ بَعْدِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Consider the one who takes his own desires as his deity, and whom God has [therefore] let go astray despite his knowledge [of the truth], sealing his ears and heart and placing a cover on his eyes: who can guide such a person after God [has abandoned him]? Will you not, then, take heed? (23)

Signs Everywhere

> Ḥā. Mīm. *This book is bestowed from on high by God, the Almighty, the Wise. Surely, in the heavens and the earth there are signs for those who believe. And in your own creation, and in the animals God scatters on earth there are signs for people of sure faith. And in the alternation of night and day, and in the means of subsistence God sends down from the skies, reviving with it the earth after it had been lifeless, and in the shifting of the winds there are signs for those who use their reason.* (Verses 1–5)

The *sūrah* mentions the revelation of this book, the Qur'ān, by God, the Almighty, the Wise after having introduced the two separate Arabic letters *Ḥā, Mīm*, to point to this book's source. In speaking about the separate letters introduced at the beginning of a number of *sūrahs*, we have mentioned elsewhere that they highlight the fact that the Qur'ān is composed of the letters forming the Arab's own language, yet they cannot produce even a very small portion like it. This, then, constitutes permanent evidence that the Qur'ān is bestowed from on high by God, the Almighty who can do whatever He wishes, the Wise who creates everything according to a certain measure and to serve a particular purpose. This is an apt comment that fits the ambience of the *sūrah* and its discussion of different types of people.

Before speaking about the unbelievers and their attitude towards the Qur'ān, the *sūrah* refers to signs pointing to the Creator that are available everywhere in the world around them. Alone, these signs should have been enough to direct them to believe in God. Now, the *sūrah* turns their minds to such signs so that they may open their hearts to them and realize that it is God who has bestowed this book from on high and that it is He who has created this great universe: "*Surely, in the heavens and the earth there are signs for those who believe.*" (Verse 3) The signs scattered everywhere in the heavens and the earth are not limited to any area or situation. Wherever we look around us we find signs. Is there anything in this wonderful universe that is not a sign pointing to its great Maker?

Look at the skies and the great celestial bodies that are scattered like small particles in space; it is such an awesome expanse, yet so pleasant to the eye. Consider these celestial bodies as they move in their respective orbits with unfailing accuracy and harmony. We are never tired of contemplating this perfect harmony which is conspicuous everywhere around us. Then look at the earth: how big it is in comparison to the humans who dwell on it, yet it is no more than a tiny particle compared to the huge stars or to the expanse in which it floats. It would have been lost in that expanse, had it not been for the hand of God placing it in its appointed position within the overall universal system. Nothing is lost sight of. Consider also how God gave this earth the necessary conditions that allow the emergence of life on it. This has required that many fine elements have been brought together in absolute accuracy of measure and quality. Should any of these qualities be in the wrong measure or be inaccurate in their function, life on earth would not have been possible nor would it have lasted.[1]

Everything on earth and every living thing, indeed every part of every living thing, large or small, is a sign. This applies to fine, little things in the same way as it applies to the large and huge: a small leaf in a great high tree or a frail plant is a sign when we contemplate its shape, size, colour and feel. A hair on the body of man or animal and a bird's feather are equally signs whether in terms of quality, length, material or function. Wherever man stretches his eyes to look at the skies or the earth, he will find a great multitude of signs that stand clear before him. Yet, who looks at these signs and understands their message? To whom are they addressed? In short, these are "*signs for those who believe.*" (Verse 3)

It is faith that opens people's hearts to receive the messages that emanate from the numerous great signs disseminated throughout the heavens and the earth. When faith touches hearts, they soften and become far more receptive. The message everything around us gives is to indicate the distinctive nature of whatever God's hand has made of objects, whether these be animate or inanimate. Indeed, everything

1. For further discussion of this point, please refer to the commentary on Verse 2 of *Sūrah* 25, in Vol. XII, pp. 379–383.

God has created is miraculous in nature. No one else can create anything similar to it.

The *sūrah* then points out that God's signs can also be seen within people themselves. They feel these close at hand: "*And in your own creation, and in the animals God scatters on earth there are signs for people of sure faith.*" (Verse 4) Man's wonderful constitution, unique qualities, varied and fine functions are all miraculous indeed, but we tend to forget this because of long familiarity. Indeed the physical make-up of any human organ fills us with wonder. In its most simple and primitive form, in the amoeba and even smaller forms, life is a miracle. If this is apparent in man's highly complex constitution how much more complex then is his psychological and emotional constitution?

Around man, countless creatures walk on earth: different kinds with a great variety of shape, size and form. Only God knows them all. The smallest is the same as the largest: they are all miraculous in their creation and in the way they fit with the overall pattern of life. No species increases beyond certain limits to the extinction of other species. Only the mighty hand of God controls them all, increasing or decreasing them according to a perfect measure, giving them the qualities and functions that ensure proper balance.

Eagles are birds of prey that enjoy longevity, but who lay only a small number of eggs and so procreate on a small scale, as compared with swallows and other small birds. What would the world of birds be like had eagles procreated at the same rate as swallows and swifts? Needless to say, all other types of birds would have vanished. The same applies to lions who are ferocious hunters. What would animal life be like, had they procreated at the same rates as sheep and deer? No other animal species would have survived in any jungle or forest. Again, the hand of God controls the number of lions to ensure continuity, and increases the numbers of sheep and deer for an easily recognized purpose. A fly lays hundreds of thousands of eggs during its life cycle, yet flies live for only around two weeks. What would happen if flies were left to live for months or years?

Thus we see that in the very act of creation and its management, the qualities of different creatures of all kinds and types, there are endless

signs that deliver the same message, but only to those who make the effort to see and contemplate these signs. These are "*signs for people of sure faith.*" Certainty of faith is the condition that makes hearts receptive and interacting. It gives them reassurance so that they can look at the facts the universe presents with ease, confidence and calm. This enables our minds to draw great conclusions from simple facts.

The *sūrah* then highlights a number of natural phenomena and their effects on human life and on the lives of other creatures: "*And in the alternation of night and day, and in the means of subsistence God sends down from the skies, reviving with it the earth after it had been lifeless, and in the shifting of the winds there are signs for those who use their reason.*" (Verse 5) The alternation of day and night is a phenomenon that has lost its significance in the minds of most people because of its regular frequency. Yet, what wonder would fill the heart of anyone who sees the approach of night or the creeping of the day for the first time? An alert mind and an open heart will always see this great wonder and marvel at it as they see in it God's hand that controls the universe.

As human knowledge of some natural phenomena increased, man came to know that the night and day result from the earth revolving in its position opposite the sun once every 24 hours. Yet the wonder is in no way diminished. Indeed, similarly wonderful is the fact that the earth revolves with such regular speed while floating in space, with nothing to hold it in place other than God's hand that has set the laws of nature in place, thus allowing life to emerge on this planet. Human knowledge broadens and people begin to recognize the great importance of the alternation of night and day for life on our planet. They understand that dividing time into night and day is essential for the emergence of life and its continuity. Without such alternation, everything on earth would be different, particularly human life. Thus the more we know, the better we feel the remarkable wonder that is this great phenomenon.

"*And in the means of subsistence God sends down from the skies, reviving with it the earth after it had been lifeless.*" (Verse 5) The '*means of subsistence*' may refer to rain pouring down, as people understood in the past. Yet the term may refer to other things that

come from the skies and have similarly important roles to play in sustaining life on earth. The rays that come from the skies provide an example. These rays are actually essential for rain, because it is the heat of the sun that causes sea water to evaporate. It then gathers in clouds that produce the rain in a process of condensation. Rain water then forms reservoirs that allows rivers to flow and springs to gush forth. Thus, after being lifeless, the earth is revived through water, heat and light.

"*And in the shifting of the winds.*" The winds blow east or west, north or south, straight or at an angle, hot and cold, but always in accordance with the accurate, synchronized system that operates in the universe, where everything is meticulously calculated leaving nothing to coincidence. The blowing of the wind has a definite relation to the movement of the earth, the alternation of day and night as also to the means of subsistence sent down from the skies. They all cooperate to fulfil God's will and how it operates in the universe. All these are signs we see in the universe, but who understands their message? It is understood only by "*those who use their reason.*" (Verse 5) Man's mind, thus, has a role, one that it should fulfil.

Those Deaf to the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān, revealed by God, highlights these universal signs in a way that inspires believers who have certainty of faith and who use their reason. In this way, it touches hearts and minds and addresses people's natures. The profound link between human nature and the universe means that it only requires some inspiring words, such as the verses of the Qur'ān, for senses to be alerted and made responsive. Anyone who does not believe as a result of contemplating these signs is totally unlikely to believe in some other way; and the one who is not fully alerted by the inspiring verses of the Qur'ān will not be alerted by loud outcries from any other source: "*Such are God's signs that We recount to you, setting forth the truth. In what discourse will they then believe, if they deny God and His revelations?*" (Verse 6)

No words will be as effective as the Qur'ān, God's word. Nor will any creation be equal to God's creation in the universe. Likewise, no

truth will be as clear and confirmed as the truth of God: "*In what discourse will they then believe, if they deny God and His revelations?*" (Verse 6)

The only requital fit to be given to an unbeliever is severe punishment:

> *Woe betide every lying, sinful person who hears God's revelations being recited to him, and yet persists in his haughty disdain, as though he had not heard them. So, give him the news of painful suffering. When he learns something of Our revelations, he ridicules it. For such people there is humiliating suffering in store. Hell lurks behind them; and all that they may have gained shall be of no avail whatsoever to them, nor shall any of those which they took for their protectors beside God. Grievous suffering awaits them.* (Verses 7–10)

These verses describe, in part, the unbelievers' reception of the Islamic message in Makkah, their stubborn refusal to listen to the clear word of truth and their insistence on falsehood. They take a hostile attitude to the truth, as if it has never even been presented to them. These verses also mention the unbelievers' rudeness and impudence as they speak of God and His word. The Qur'ān severely rebukes them for this, putting before them the grievous and humiliating suffering they are certain to endure.

"*Woe betide every lying, sinful person.*" (Verse 7) This verse threatens every habitual liar who frequently indulges in sin. The threat is issued by God Almighty who is able to bring about the total destruction of any community, and whose promises and warnings always come true. This makes the warning all the more serious and frightening.

The mark of such a lying, sinful person is that he persistently holds on to what is false, looks with disdain on the truth, feels too proud to respond to God's revelations and behaves with insolence towards God. He thus: "*hears God's revelations being recited to him, and yet persists in his haughty disdain, as though he had not heard them.*" (Verse 8) Although this hateful type of person could be found among the idolaters in Makkah, the same type is seen in every *jāhiliyyah* society, immersed in ignorance, whether in the past, present or future. Many

are those all over the world, including some who are described as Muslims, who behave with disdain when they hear God's revelations being recited and who persist in their erring ways as though they have never heard such revelations. They do so because what God has revealed is contrary to their desire and will not approve the evil and false practices in which they indulge.

"*So, give him the news of painful suffering.*" (Verse 8) This statement describes the punishment such a person will receive, but the Arabic text uses the word *bashshir* for 'giving news', even though the word is only used for giving good news. As used in this verse to bring news of painful suffering, it thus carries connotations of ridicule. If this person does not listen to the warning, let him receive the news of his suffering in a voice that signals good news. What mockery!

"*When he learns something of Our revelations, he ridicules it,*" after learning their source. This is a far more serious and grave response. Yet it describes an oft found situation in every community that lives in a state of ignorance, or *jāhiliyyah*. How many are those, including some described as Muslims, who ridicule God's revelations, mocking them and those who believe in them. "*For such people there is humiliating suffering in store.*" (Verse 9) Humiliation is the fitting requital for everyone who ridicules God's revelations.

This suffering is ready and close at hand. It may not be time for it yet, but it is nevertheless present: "*Hell lurks behind them*". (Verse 10) The phrase, '*behind them*,' has connotations that are specifically intended. Since the suffering is 'behind' them, they do not see it and remain oblivious to it. Therefore, they do not try to avoid it. Yet it will surely engulf them. "*All that they may have gained shall be of no avail whatsoever to them, nor shall any of those which they took for their protectors beside God.*" (Verse 10) Nothing that they might have done or gained is of any use to them. Even if some of their deeds are good, they cannot benefit from them because they have been scattered by the wind like dust. Their deeds were not founded on a solid basis of faith. Likewise, their possessions will be of no use to them. Nor can their deities, friends, supporters or soldiers offer them help or protection. Nor can they intercede on their behalf. "*Grievous suffering awaits them.*" (Verse 10) Their punishment is not only humiliating, as

fits their offence for mocking God's revelations, it is also grievous to suit the magnitude of that offence.

This section concludes with a word that describes, in general terms, the true nature of God's revelations and the punishment to be meted out to those who disbelieve them: "*This is true guidance; those who reject their Lord's revelations shall suffer abominable punishment.*" (Verse 11) It is a fact that this Qur'ān is true and pure guidance that admits no error whatsoever. Therefore, anyone who denies its truth deserves such grievous suffering. The nature of the pain is described here as abominable, which serves to emphasize its description in the previous verses.

Will They Reflect?

Once again the *sūrah* reminds them of the great favours and blessings God has given them in this world, so that their hearts may soften and reflect:

> *It is God who has subjected the sea for you, so that ships sail through it by His command, and that you may seek of His bounty, and that you give thanks. And He has subjected to you, as a gift from Himself, all that is in the heavens and on earth. In this there are signs for people who think.* (Verses 12–13)

Man, an insignificant creature in this great universe, receives a large share of God's care, which allows him to make use of greater creatures in the universe, benefiting by them in a variety of ways when he understands a part of the secret, Divine law that controls all. Had man remained ignorant of this part of God's law, he could not, weak as he is, have benefited by such great forces. He would not even be able to live with them, considering his small stature and strength compared with theirs.

The sea is one such huge force which God has subjected to man by revealing to him a portion of its secret make-up and qualities. Thus, man has been able to make ships sail through the huge oceans without fear of its strong waves: "*so that ships sail through it by His command.*" (Verse 12) It is God who has given the sea and the material from which ships are made their qualities and made atmospheric pressure, the speed

of winds, earth's gravity and other universal features in the way they are. Thus, they combine to allow ships to sail through the sea. God further guided man to understand all this and make use of it for his own benefit, whether it be by fishing, trade, gaining knowledge, or sports and pleasure: "*And that you may seek of His bounty.*" It behoves man, then, to turn to God in gratitude for all these favours: "*and that you give thanks.*" (Verse 12) The Qur'ān directs man to attend to this duty and to understand the close relationship between him and the universe. Everything has been originated by God and everything will ultimately return to Him.

Having specified the sea, the *sūrah* makes a general reference to God's favours. He has made all the forces, potentials and blessings in the universe that have a bearing on man's task on earth subservient to him: "*And He has subjected to you, as a gift from Himself, all that is in the heavens and on earth.*" (Verse 13) Everything in the universe is created by God. He controls it and determines its operation. Man, a small creature in the universe, is given the ability to understand a part of the laws of nature that operate, by God's will, in this universe. This enables him to make use of powers and forces that are immeasurably greater than his own. Without God's grace, he would not have been able to do so. In all this, there are signs to reflect upon: "*In this there are signs for people who think.*" (Verse 13)

Forgiveness of Offenders

Now the *sūrah* calls on believers to show magnanimity and forbearance to those who are weak because their hearts do not open to the great source of power. They are urged to show kindness to those who are blind to the great truths, and as a result, do not look forward to God's great days when some aspects of His majesty are clearly shown:

> *Tell the believers that they should forgive those who do not look forward to the Days of God. It is for Him alone to requite people for whatever they may have earned. Whoever does what is right benefits himself; and whoever does evil causes himself harm. In the end to your Lord you will all return.* (Verses 14–15)

This directive is issued to the believers, requiring them to be forbearing towards those who do not look forward to God's days. Theirs should be an attitude of forgiveness that combines generosity with power and dignity. The truth is that such people deserve pity and sympathy because they are deprived of the benefit of believing in God, which is a rich treasure of grace, strength, wealth, reassurance and kindness. It provides true protection in moments of stress and weakness. They are also deprived of true knowledge that understands the nature of universal laws and what they can bring of power and riches for man's benefit. Those who enjoy the wealth of grace and benefits that come with faith are the ones who should be forbearing. They should forgive the slips and errors of the ones who are deprived of them.

On the other hand, the believers should leave the matter to God and He will requite all as they deserve. He will then credit them with their forbearing attitude and reward them for it as a deed of goodness. Such forgiveness naturally applies to what does not spread corruption on earth and does not constitute a transgression of the bounds set by God: "*It is for Him alone to requite people for whatever they may have earned.*" (Verse 14) This is followed by an assertion about every person's individual responsibility and about fair judgement for all. It further confirms that all will return to God: "*Whoever does what is right benefits himself; and whoever does evil causes himself harm. In the end to your Lord you will all return.*" (Verse 15) When this is made clear, a believer is able to be forbearing and to overlook personal offences, but this forbearance is not out of weakness. Instead, he is the one who is strong and magnanimous. He holds the torch of guidance to enable the ones deprived of light to see. He comes forward with the cure for those who are ill. He will be rewarded according to his deeds, unharmed by those who do evil. All matters are ultimately judged by God, to whom all shall return.

The Leaders of Humanity

The *sūrah* then speaks of the leadership of humanity and how it has ultimately been assigned to believers in the Islamic message. It refers to the divisions that split the Children of Israel after God had given

them scriptures, wisdom and prophethood. The mantle of leadership has now been given to the messenger advocating God's final message. This was clearly stated when the Prophet was still in Makkah, suffering with his followers from persecution by the unbelievers. Yet this tells us something about the nature of the Islamic message, right from its very beginning, and the mission it is expected to fulfil:

> *To the Children of Israel We gave revelations, wisdom and prophethood; and We provided them with wholesome things and favoured them above all other nations. We granted them clear indications in matters of faith. It was only after knowledge had been granted them that they began to differ maliciously among themselves. Your Lord will certainly judge between them on Resurrection Day regarding all that on which they differed. And now We have set you on a clear way of religion; so follow it, and do not follow the desires of those who do not know [the truth]. They will be of no help to you against God. The wrongdoers have only one another to protect them, whereas God is the Protector of all who are God-fearing. This [revelation] is a means of insight for mankind, and a source of guidance and grace for people of sure faith.* (Verses 16–20)

Before the advent of Islam, the leadership of mankind was assigned to the Children of Israel. They were the community entrusted with the Divine faith God laid down for a certain period of time. Mankind needs a leadership enlightened with Divine guidance. When human leadership is based on earthly considerations alone, with no reference to Divine guidance, it is pulled in different directions whether by desire, ignorance or commonplace failings. God alone, the Creator of mankind, is the One who gives people a law that is free from the pressures of desire, ignorance or failing. He is the One who knows best what suits His creation.

"*To the Children of Israel We gave revelations, wisdom and prophethood.*" (Verse 16) They were given the Torah, containing God's law, and they had a state where they were required to implement this law. They were also given prophethood after Moses so as to ensure the

continued and right implementation of this Divine law. Prophets were sent to them in succession over a relatively long period of history. "*We provided them with wholesome things and favoured them above all other nations.*" (Verse 16) Their kingdom was in the holy land, which yielded rich harvests of all types, stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates.

"*We granted them clear indications in matters of faith.*" (Verse 17) What they were given of the Divine law was clear and decisive, free of ambiguity, confusion and contradiction. There was absolutely no reason for them to differ over this clear law. There was no obscurity over any question of their faith or its laws, and they were certainly aware of the right judgement on all matters of importance. Nevertheless, "*it was only after knowledge had been granted them that they began to differ maliciously among themselves.*" (Verse 17) Such disputes were motivated by mutual envy, malice and injustice, despite their knowing the truth. Therefore, their leadership of mankind was terminated, and their case is left to God, who will judge them on the Day of Resurrection: "*Your Lord will certainly judge between them on Resurrection Day regarding all that on which they differed.*" (Verse 17)

God then assigned a new leadership, imparted a new message to a different messenger, put His Divine law back on its right course and gave back to Divine faith its absolute clarity. This new leadership is thus guided by God's law, not by any human desire: "*And now We have set you on a clear way of religion; so follow it, and do not follow the desires of those who do not know [the truth].*" (Verse 18) Thus matters are defined in absolute clarity: it is either God's law or people's changing desires that are devoid of knowledge. There can be no third alternative and no middle way. No one abandons Divine law unless they choose to pursue human desires. Everything that differs with God's law is the expression of desire that pleases those who lack knowledge. God warns His messenger against following the desires of those who have no knowledge of the truth, as they will be of no avail to him. They only try to protect one another. Thus, they cannot harm him in any way as God will support and protect him: "*They will be of no help to you against God. The wrongdoers have only one another to protect them, whereas God is the Protector of all who are God-fearing.*" (Verse 19)

This verse and the one before it charts the way for the advocates of the Divine message, leaving no need for any comment or further detail: "*And now We have set you on a clear way of religion; so follow it, and do not follow the desires of those who do not know [the truth]. They will be of no help to you against God. The wrongdoers have only one another to protect them, whereas God is the Protector of all who are God-fearing.*" (Verses 18–19) There is only one law that fits this description; everything else is the result of desire and ignorance. Every advocate of the Divine faith must follow only that. Those who espouse desire cannot help a believer: they only help one another and will not abandon their course. Yet they are too weak to be able to cause a believer any harm, since God is the One who protects the God-fearing. How can humans who, in their ignorance and weakness, have only one another for support be compared to one who advocates God's law and is protected by Him?

Commenting on this decisive clarification, the *sūrah* mentions the certainty of faith and what the Qur'ān provides of insight, guidance and Divine grace: "*This [revelation] is a means of insight for mankind, and a source of guidance and grace for people of sure faith.*" (Verse 20) Describing the Qur'ān as a means of insight emphasizes its role of providing enlightenment. The Qur'ān provides insight, and insight makes matters clear. Moreover, the Qur'ān itself is guidance and mercy, but all this is dependent on certainty of faith which admits no doubt or worry. With such certainty, we know the way as it appears before us clear, straight, leading to a well defined goal. We go along this way sure of step and without hesitation. The Qur'ān is our source of light and guidance. It is indeed the embodiment of God's grace.

Totally Unequal

The *sūrah* clearly distinguishes between those who commit evil and those who do good as a result of being believers. There is no way that they can be judged in the same way. They are different in God's sight. Furthermore, God has established His universal law on the basis of truth and justice:

> *Do those who indulge in sinful deeds think that We shall place them, both in their life and their death, on an equal footing with those who believe and do righteous deeds? Flawed is their judgement. God has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth, so that every soul shall be recompensed according to its deeds. None shall be wronged.* (Verses 21–22)

The first of these verses may be understood to refer to those among the people of earlier revelations who deviated from their scriptures and indulged in sin, but who nonetheless continued to think of themselves as believers. They might have thought themselves to be on the same level as Muslims who do good deeds. They might also have considered that the two groups are equal in God's sight, both in this life and in the life after death when people are given their reward or punishment. These verses may also be taken as a general discourse defining how people are judged on God's scales. It shows that believers who do good deeds are definitely in a higher position. It says that putting the evildoers and the righteous on the same level, either in this life or in the next, conflicts with the basic and permanent rule upon which the universe is founded, namely, the truth. Thus the truth is fundamental to both the universe and the Divine law. Consequently, both the universe and human life are set to progress by means of this truth. This manifests itself in the distinction between evildoers and those who do good in all respects, and in the individual judging of people on the basis of what each has earned through life. Justice is, thus, administered to all: "*None shall be wronged.*" (Verse 22) This is the constant truth, the foundational stone of the entire universe.

The *sūrah* then refers to desire, which is by nature changing and fleeting. Yet some people make of desire a deity and thus they are unable to recognize true guidance:

> *Consider the one who takes his own desires as his deity, and whom God has [therefore] let go astray despite his knowledge [of the truth], sealing his ears and heart and placing a cover on his eyes: who can guide such a person after God [has abandoned him]? Will you not, then, take heed?* (Verse 23)

The inimitable Qur'ānic style draws here an extraordinary image of the human soul when it abandons the basic and permanent rule of truth in order to follow fleeting desires, making of them a deity from which concepts, rules, feelings and actions are derived. In this way does man submit to desire and obey its dictates. This extraordinary situation is painted in a tone that invites strong censure.

"*Consider the one who takes his own desires as his deity!*" Such an example should be carefully considered. A person of this ilk deserves to be abandoned by God so that he goes even further astray: no light of guidance will be given to him by Divine mercy. After all, he has left no room in his heart for such guidance when he worships his own desires: "*And whom God has [therefore] let go astray despite his knowledge [of the truth].*" The Arabic phrase, *'alā 'ilm*, may be translated as, 'in full knowledge', in which case it refers to God's knowledge that such a person deserves to be left astray. Alternatively, it can be translated as we have rendered here as '*despite his knowledge*'. In other words, his knowledge of the truth does not deter him from pursuing his desires. Such a person deserves to be left straying in blindness: "*sealing his ears and heart and placing a cover on his eyes.*" His receptive faculties are sealed, allowing no light or guidance to seep through. His judgement is, thus, fundamentally impaired.

"*Who can guide such a person after God [has abandoned him]?*" (Verse 23) All guidance comes from God. No one can provide anyone with guidance or error, not even His chosen messengers. It is all determined by God alone. "*Will you not, then, take heed?*" (Verse 23) When a person takes heed, he will break the chains of desire and return to the straight path of truth. No one who treads this path will ever go astray.

2

To Whom Supremacy Belongs

وَقَالُوا۟ مَا هِىَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا ٱلدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا
وَمَا يُهْلِكُنَآ إِلَّا ٱلدَّهْرُ ۚ وَمَا لَهُم بِذَٰلِكَ مِنْ
عِلْمٍ ۖ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

They say: 'There is nothing beyond our life in this world. We die, we live, nothing but time destroys us.' Of this they have no knowledge whatsoever. They merely guess. (24)

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَايَٰتُنَا بَيِّنَٰتٍ مَّا كَانَ
حُجَّتَهُمْ إِلَّآ أَن قَالُوا۟ ٱئْتُوا۟ بِـَٔابَآئِنَآ
إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

Whenever Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, their only argument is to say: 'Bring back our forefathers, if what you claim be true.' (25)

قُلِ ٱللَّهُ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يَجْمَعُكُمْ
إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ
ٱلنَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

Say: 'It is God who gives you life, then causes you to die; and then He will gather you all on Resurrection Day of which there is no doubt, though most people do not understand.' (26)

وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۚ وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ
ٱلسَّاعَةُ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَخْسَرُ ٱلْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

To God belongs the dominion over the heavens and the earth. When the Last Hour strikes, those who follow falsehood will on that Day lose all. (27)

You will see every community on its knees. Every community will be summoned to its record: 'Today you shall be requited for all that you did. (28)

وَتَرَىٰ كُلَّ أُمَّةٍ جَاثِيَةً ۚ كُلُّ أُمَّةٍ تُدْعَىٰ إِلَىٰ كِتَٰبِهَا ۖ ٱلْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

This Our record speaks of you in all truth; for We have been recording everything you do.' (29)

هَٰذَا كِتَٰبُنَا يَنطِقُ عَلَيْكُم بِٱلْحَقِّ ۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا نَسْتَنسِخُ مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Those who believed and did righteous deeds will be admitted by their Lord into His grace. That will be the manifest triumph. (30)

فَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ فَيُدْخِلُهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ فِى رَحْمَتِهِۦ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلْفَوْزُ ٱلْمُبِينُ ﴿٣٠﴾

And as for the unbelievers, [they will be asked]: 'When My revelations were recited to you, did you not glory in your arrogance and persist in your wicked ways? (31)

وَأَمَّا ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا۟ أَفَلَمْ تَكُنْ ءَايَٰتِى تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ فَٱسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ وَكُنتُمْ قَوْمًا مُّجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

For when it was said, "God's promise will certainly come true, and there can be no doubt about the Last Hour," you would answer, "We know nothing of the Last Hour. We think it is all conjecture, and we are by no means convinced."' (32)

وَإِذَا قِيلَ إِنَّ وَعْدَ ٱللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَٱلسَّاعَةُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا قُلْتُم مَّا نَدْرِى مَا ٱلسَّاعَةُ إِن نَّظُنُّ إِلَّا ظَنًّا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُسْتَيْقِنِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

The evil of their deeds will become clear to them, and they will be overwhelmed by the very thing they used to deride. (33)

وَبَدَا لَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا عَمِلُوا وَحَاقَ بِهِم
مَّا كَانُوا بِهِۦ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

It will be said to them: 'Today We shall be oblivious of you as you were oblivious of the coming of this your Day! The fire will be your abode, and you will have no one to help you. (34)

وَقِيلَ ٱلْيَوْمَ نَنسَىٰكُمْ كَمَا نَسِيتُمْ لِقَآءَ
يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا وَمَأْوَىٰكُمُ ٱلنَّارُ وَمَا لَكُم
مِّن نَّٰصِرِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

Thus it is, because you received God's revelations with ridicule and allowed the life of this world to beguile you.' Therefore, they will not be brought out of the Fire on that Day, nor will they be given a chance to make amends. (35)

ذَٰلِكُم بِأَنَّكُمُ ٱتَّخَذْتُمْ ءَايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ هُزُوًا
وَغَرَّتْكُمُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا ۚ فَٱلْيَوْمَ لَا يُخْرَجُونَ
مِنْهَا وَلَا هُمْ يُسْتَعْتَبُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

All praise is due to God, the Lord of the heavens, the Lord of the earth and the Lord of all the worlds. (36)

فَلِلَّهِ ٱلْحَمْدُ رَبِّ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَرَبِّ ٱلْأَرْضِ
رَبِّ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

His alone is all supremacy in the heavens and the earth. He alone is the Almighty, the Wise. (37)

وَلَهُ ٱلْكِبْرِيَآءُ فِى ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ ۖ
وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيزُ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٧﴾

Overview

This last passage of the *sūrah* presents what the idolaters used to say about the hereafter, resurrection and accountability on the Day of Judgement. It refutes their arguments, citing irrefutable evidence drawn from their own particular situation. It then portrays a scene from the Day of Judgement which they see as closing in upon them, even though it is not as yet due. This is because the Qur'ānic style presents it as if it is there before their very eyes.

The *sūrah* then concludes with praises of God, the only Lord of the heavens and the earth and all those who live within them. His glory is extolled and no one can aspire to His position of absolute power.

A Narrow View of Life

> *They say: 'There is nothing beyond our life in this world. We die, we live, nothing but time destroys us.' Of this they have no knowledge whatsoever. They merely guess. Whenever Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, their only argument is to say: 'Bring back our forefathers, if what you claim be true.' Say: 'It is God who gives you life, then causes you to die; and then He will gather you all on Resurrection Day of which there is no doubt, though most people do not understand.'* (Verses 24–26)

So short-sighted were they that they considered life to be nothing beyond what they saw before their very eyes: one generation dies and another replaces it in life. Apparently, no hand deals death; it is all a question of days that pass and time that elapses bringing death to all. It is time, then, that ends their lives, making them die. This is a superficial outlook that does not go beyond appearances to discover subtle reasons and causes. They do not ask what brings them life; or, when it is there, what takes it away? They see that death does not occur according to a defined system or after a certain number of days and years. Instead, they think that only the passage of time deprives them of life. Death comes to all: children and the elderly, the healthy and the ill, the strong and the weak. Therefore, when we carefully

consider the reason behind all this, time is an inadequate explanation. Therefore, God says of them: "*Of this they have no knowledge whatsoever. They merely guess.*" (Verse 24) Their guesses are wild, lack proper reflection, sound knowledge and an understanding of cause and effect. They do not look carefully at the two phenomena of life and death to realize that they are the result of a will other than that of man and a reason other than the passage of time.

"*Whenever Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, their only argument is to say: 'Bring back our forefathers, if what you claim be true.'*" (Verse 25) This is a similarly superficial outlook devoid of any understanding of the laws of creation, God's wisdom or the secret that lies beyond life and death. People live on this planet so that they have a chance to work towards their ultimate destiny. Thus, God tests them by means of what He places at their disposal in this life. They then die and await the time of reckoning determined by Him. They will account for what they did in this life. Therefore, when they die, they do not return to this world. No purpose is served by such a return before the appointed time. They will not return merely because a group of human beings suggest they should. The major laws God has set in operation in the universe are not changed as a result of human suggestion. There is no question whatsoever of their naïvety in answer to God's revelations being taken up: "*Bring back our forefathers, if what you claim be true.*" (Verse 25)

Why should God bring back their forefathers before the time He, in His infinite wisdom, has determined? To convince them that God is able to bring the dead back to life? How amazing! Do they not see that God initiates life at every moment before their very eyes, in accordance with the law He has set for life? "*Say: It is God who gives you life, then causes you to die; and then He will gather you all on Resurrection Day of which there is no doubt.*" (Verse 26) The very miracle they want to see done to their fathers occurs before their very eyes. It is God who grants life and causes death. There is nothing surprising, then, that He will bring the dead back to life, gathering them all on Resurrection Day. Why should they entertain any doubt about this, when they see it occurring before them: "*Though most people do not understand.*" (Verse 26)

The Qur'ān's comment on this visible fact cites the origin of all: "*To God belongs the dominion over the heavens and the earth.*" (Verse 27) He is the One who makes and controls everything in the universe, and He is the One able to originate and reinstate everything and everyone.

The Record of All Deeds

They are now presented with a scene from the day that they doubt will ever come:

> *When the Last Hour strikes, those who follow falsehood will on that Day lose all. You will see every community on its knees. Every community will be summoned to its record: 'Today you shall be requited for all that you did. This Our record speaks of you in all truth; for We have been recording everything you do.'* (Verses 27–29)

In the first of these verses they are told of the fate of those who follow falsehood. They are the ones who end up in utter loss. Then we are given a panoramic view, with all the generations that have dwelled on the surface of this planet throughout the ages gathered together. They all sit on their knees, each community distinguished from the next, but all awaiting their dreaded accountability. The atmosphere is one of awe and fear. How can it be otherwise, when the assembly brings together everyone from all generations, and they are all on their knees? Greater fear is inspired by what lies ahead of people having to account for their deeds. What generates most fear, however, is that they have to face God Almighty, the Most Gracious, whose blessings were not met with gratitude, on earth, by most of those gathered before Him.

All those waiting on their knees look anxiously, breathless and with dry mouths. They are told: "*Today you shall be requited for all that you did. This Our record speaks of you in all truth; for We have been recording everything you do.*" (Verses 28–29) All of them, belonging to different communities, races and generations, are split into two groups – believers and unbelievers – for there is no other banner to raise on that occasion. One is God's party and the other is Satan's.

"*Those who believed and did righteous deeds will be admitted by their Lord into His grace. That will be the manifest triumph.*" (Verse 30) They are the ones who are given comfort to dispel all worry and anxiety. The outcome of their situation is given straightaway, easily and without delay, so as to spread over them a pleasant air. But what do we find as we stretch our eyes through the words of the text to look at the other party? We hear a long and shameful rebuke one that reminds them of their worst sayings and deeds:

> *And as for the unbelievers, [they will be asked]: When My revelations were recited to you, did you not glory in your arrogance and persist in your wicked ways? For when it was said, 'God's promise will certainly come true, and there can be no doubt about the Last Hour,' you would answer, 'We know nothing of the Last Hour. We think it is all conjecture, and we are by no means convinced.'"* (Verses 31–32)

How do you view your situation now? Are you convinced? Then the *sūrah* turns away for a moment to give us a glimpse of what happens to them: "*The evil of their deeds will become clear to them, and they will be overwhelmed by the very thing they used to deride.*" (Verse 33) Further reproach is heaped upon their heads, and they are told that their lot will be nothing other than total disregard, humiliation as well as painful doom:

> *It will be said to them: 'Today We shall be oblivious of you as you were oblivious of the coming of this your Day! The fire will be your abode, and you will have no one to help you. Thus it is, because you received God's revelations with ridicule and allowed the life of this world to beguile you.'* (Verses 34–35)

As their ultimate fate is announced, the curtains are drawn leaving them in hell from which they cannot hope to leave and where they are not asked for excuses or justification: "*Therefore, they will not be brought out of the Fire on that Day, nor will they be given a chance to make amends.*" (Verse 35) As we listen, we almost hear the doors of

hell as they are finally closed. The scene is completed; nothing of it will change.

The *sūrah* concludes with voices praising and glorifying God:

> *All praise is due to God, the Lord of the heavens, the Lord of the earth and the Lord of all the worlds. His alone is all supremacy in the heavens and the earth. He alone is the Almighty, the Wise.* (Verses 36–37)

The praising voice declares God's Lordship over the universe: earth and heaven, mankind and *jinn*, birds and beasts, as well as everyone and everything. They are all under the care of one Lord who is totally in control. Praised is He for the care He takes of them all. The glorifying voice declares that all supremacy in the universe belongs to God alone. To Him bows every exalted tyrant, and to His power submits every rebellious nature. Furthermore, to Him belongs the supreme power and absolute wisdom. Praise and glory to God, the Lord of all the worlds.